

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 RANGOON 001236

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TAGS: [KCRM](#) [KWMN](#) [PHUM](#) [ELAB](#) [PGOV](#) [EAID](#) [BM](#) [NGO](#)

SUBJECT: BURMA: TIP NGOS WORKING WITH TIGHTER RESTRICTIONS

REF: A. RANGOON 1215
B. RANGOON 1186
C. RANGOON 1001

Classified By: Econoff TLMAnlowe for Reason 1.4 (b,d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Representatives of international NGOs and UN agencies working on Trafficking-in-Persons (TIP) projects told Mark Taylor, G/TIP's Senior Coordinator, about the difficulties they face in Burma, including expired MOUs with the government, restricted travel for expatriate staff, and pressure to move away from border areas where much of the repatriation work is done. Although some organizations have had recent activities curtailed, and many representatives expressed discomfort with the capriciousness of government controls, all planned to continue their work in country, and suggested new opportunities for USG assistance for direct repatriation and local capacity building. The NGOs generally approved of the GOB's new anti-trafficking law, promulgated in early September, but doubted the regime's implementation abilities. End summary.

Progress Being Made in a Difficult Environment

¶2. (C) In an October 3-4 visit, G/TIP Senior Coordinator Mark Taylor and Econoff met representatives from international NGOs and UN agencies active in anti-trafficking projects in Burma. Most viewed the GOB's new anti-trafficking law positively, but remained skeptical about the ability of authorities to implement its provisions. All NGO representatives described operational and procedural difficulties, particularly expired MOUs that had not been renewed for years, giving them scant legal cover if they were ever enforced. Different GOB counterparts accounted for some of the variety in difficulties each NGO faced, with the Department of Social Welfare seen as weak and delaying, and the Ministry of Health viewed as the most reasonable and helpful. Even semantics are a TIP issue in Burma, with UNICEF officers avoiding the term "child labor" so as not to offend GOB sensitivities.

¶3. (C) Despite the uncertain environment, NGOs have been able to accomplish many tasks, including the following:

-- Save the Children (STC-UK) officials said that, in January, they assisted with the government-to-government repatriation of forty-three Burmese women from Thailand; in June, they assisted five more women, and in September, twenty-three women were repatriated from China, where they were sent as brides for forced marriages. At a Rangoon repatriation center, STC-UK gives initial training in life skills and follows up with medical, psycho/social and income generation assistance once the victims return to their villages. The GOB had told STC-UK that it could no longer perform anti-trafficking work at their sites in fourteen townships near the border because STC-UK had no TIP-related MOU. STC-UK continues its TIP work at these locations, however, using the cover of its MOU on HIV/AIDS work. STC-UK is conducting a study on migration into China, and plans to expand into Burma's central dry zone to work with children trafficked for entertainment, domestic work, and factory labor.

-- World Vision (WV) receives victims returned across the border in non-government repatriations and also retrieves victims from government repatriation centers. Working with village organizations including churches, NGOs and Buddhist groups, WV assesses the village support base and provides appropriate services. To strengthen organizations working in areas with no STC or WV representation, WV trains local GOB and NGO partners, primarily in the areas of family support and needs assessments. The organization also works with communities to help them develop and fund their own anti-trafficking programs. WV described more opportunities for direct intervention with victims, and noted that their UK Department for International Development (DFID) funding will expire in December 2005.

-- Representatives from the Australian government's Asian Regional Cooperation to Prevent People Trafficking (ARCPPT) project and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) briefed about the establishment of seven GOB border liaison offices, which can become platforms to fight human, as well as drug, trafficking. ARCPPT also trains law enforcement personnel,

including members of the special anti-trafficking unit, providing basic investigative skills, as well as specialized skills in human trafficking. The GOB plans to post officers at "hot spots" on the border. While pleased with the addition of twenty new officers to the GOB's police anti-trafficking unit, the ARCPPT regional trainer said these new officers had no investigative background and that he hoped to assume his intended role as operational advisor to the unit soon.

-- Dr. Ei Kalya Moore, National Project Coordinator of the UN Interagency Project on Human Trafficking (UNIAP) Burma Office, said her primary responsibilities are to act as the Secretariat for the COMMIT (Coordinated Mekong Ministerial

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Initiative Against Trafficking); coordinate donor relations and technical support; and monitor and evaluate the GOB's development of its National Plan of Action on trafficking. UNIAP also acts as the coordinating body between government and non-government bodies in the Task Force for Repatriation and coordinator of an INGO Working Group that meets quarterly to define goals and coordinate strategies.

Work Became Harder After the October 2004 Purge

14. (C) Many NGO reps noted that their difficulties increased after the October 2004 purge of former PM Khin Nyunt and many members of the Military Intelligence (MI) network under him. All interlocutors said that the new officials who replaced MI exert much closer control over NGO activities and are stricter on enforcing conditions in their MOUs (Ref C). Not only have expatriates faced increased obstacles visiting program sites, but even some local staff face travel restrictions. For example, UNICEF officers said their dialogue with the GOB about child soldiers had halted since late last year, with no signs of an intent to resume. Also, WV attributed the recent closure of its Mandalay drop-in center for street children to the local Military Commander's personal reaction to a perceived slight to his wife. WV has since found it harder to get approval for its projects (Ref B). Initial GOB cooperation with the ILO on forced labor declined after May 2005, and the ILO Liaison Officer reconfirmed that the army continues to commit some of the worst of the country's labor abuses, including conscripting child soldiers. The ILO reported on October 28 that the GOB plan to end its cooperation with the international organization. (Ref A).

INGOs Identify Needs

15. (C) NGO interlocutors acknowledged that significant actions have been taken by the GOB to fight TIP, such as government-to-government repatriations, GOB membership in COMMIT, and acceptance of outside advice in drafting their new TIP Law. The majority of substantive work, however, is performed by international NGOs. Drawing on their experience in the field, NGO representatives identified numerous areas requiring more support, including direct assistance and continuing care for victims, awareness raising activities, development of educational and training materials, training of personnel staffing repatriation centers, and the extension of programs into the dry zone in central Burma. G/TIP has provided approximately \$216,500 in funding to UNIAP and World Vision for multi-year programs that will expire in 2006.

Comment: Reaching Victims, Avoiding the Regime

16. (C) Burma remains a Tier 3 TIP state for a reason. Although the most significant form of trafficking in Burma is state-sanctioned forced labor, cross-border trafficking for domestic servitude, commercial labor and the sex trade, along with internal trafficking, continue apace. Despite passage of the new TIP Law, the GOB does not have the capability or resources to adequately prevent or prosecute trafficking cases, or to protect and reintegrate victims. International NGOs try hard to fill that gap. The USG can continue to support effective anti-TIP efforts without benefiting the GOB by working through international NGOs that provide rigorous accountability and monitoring to ensure the funding is spent directly on the victims. In spite of stricter controls, much good work is continuing. The expiration of funding from other sources provides an opportunity for the USG to continue its efforts to demonstrate how this issue can effectively be addressed in Burma and to keep it from becoming an even greater problem for neighboring states. End comment.

17. (U) This cable was approved in draft by Mr. Taylor.
VILLAROSA